

Establishing and Funding Research Initiatives, Centers, and Institutes

Office of the Vice President for Research, Iowa State University

Centers and institutes are a means by which Iowa State University helps to facilitate cutting-edge, highly interdisciplinary research, competitiveness for extramural funding, and the success of our faculty and staff. The costs involved, however, are high in terms of funding, personnel, and space. For this reason, the establishment of a center or institute cannot be taken lightly.

Formal proposals to establish a center or institute are reviewed and approved by all departmental chairs and/or center/institute directors involved, by academic deans involved, the Vice President for Extension if the center is focused predominately on outreach activities, the Vice President for Research if research activities are the primary function of the center, and the Senior Vice President and Provost. Board of Regents Form C—"Request to Establish a Center or Institute" should accompany the approval process. Once the formal proposal is reviewed, the Senior Vice President and Provost will forward a recommendation to the President. If the President concurs that a center/institute be established, the proposal moves on to approval of the Board of Regents, State of Iowa.

In many cases, the first step in the creation of a research center is the establishment of a research initiative. There are exceptions, including funding of a center or institute through a legislative action or national external funding that establishes a center or institute (NSF centers, for example). Even in these cases, however, the criteria below must be met to justify forming a center. Note that many administrative and teaching "centers" within the university are not considered centers under the terms described here.

1. STAGE I: GETTING STARTED—ESTABLISHING A RESEARCH INITIATIVE

Researchers interested in creating a multi-disciplinary research center who do not already receive sufficient external funding annually to support a center's activities (Stage II), first need to come together as an "initiative." They may be eligible for seed funding from a variety of sources, such as the Office of the Vice President for Research and/or the colleges.

Purpose. The purpose of an initiative is to facilitate interactions among a group of interested faculty and research staff to explore *new and cutting-edge* research areas that are beyond the intellectual reach of their individual current work. Such areas, if they can garner sufficient external funding, have the potential to become centers. Initiatives and centers are *not* intended for aggregations of individuals each doing their own projects.

Eligibility. Faculty and research staff members interested in establishing an "initiative" should contact the Office of the Vice President for Research to determine their eligibility. To be eligible, the researchers must have well-established research programs with a proven and strong record of sponsored funding and must propose projects in *new areas of research interest* that require a highly interdisciplinary approach.

Funding for an Initiative. An initiative may receive limited funding (depending on availability) for a period of three years; annual renewal will be based on satisfactory progress toward sufficient external funding to support a center. Any seed grants provided are not meant to serve as bridge funds or to supplement startup packages.

Seed grants are intended to facilitate faculty interactions such as group meetings, build connections with researchers from other universities, and lay the groundwork to build research teams.

Expectations. Initiatives receiving seed grants must be reviewed annually by the unit or units providing the funds. Annual reviews should evaluate how the team-building activities have fared and the feasibility of developing the proposed research program at ISU into an externally funded center.

Sunset. If the initiative fails to meet the expectations at the end of the seed-grant period, especially with respect to external funding, the initiative will be closed. If the initiative is able to obtain sufficient external funds to support its group activities, but does not wish to move forward to become a center, it may continue as a group (described as initiative, faculty, office, etc.). However, it will no longer be funded internally and may not be called a center.

2. STAGE II: MOVING FROM AN INITIATIVE TO A CENTER

An initiative is a pre-cursor to a center. It is a trial period to see if the proposed research program has the ability to compete nationally for adequate research funding to support a center. An initiative that is successful in obtaining external funding for the *new area of research interest* and that has attained a scope of activity that is “center-scale” may be ready to graduate into a center. Centers have a broader area of research interest, broader funding base, and broader mission than a single research group or small group of related research labs.

Eligibility. An initiative may seek the status of a center if the following conditions are met:

- The initiative has been successful in identifying an area of interdisciplinary research that is of scientific/intellectual interest, builds on ISU’s strengths, and is recognized as an area of interest by funding agencies.
- The researchers who are part of the initiative have national prominence in some aspects of this research area.
- The team of researchers is highly organized and has a solid track record of success working together; that is, there is a strong foundation upon which to build the proposed center’s activities.
- There is a clear synergy among researchers spanning departments and colleges that should allow them to achieve goals that they could not achieve individually. That is, they are not just an aggregation of researchers and projects but an interdisciplinary team working toward a common goal or goals.
- There is a clear plan that identifies the intellectual, management, and financial targets.
- There is expectation of scholarly research outcomes but also an education and/or outreach component as well.
- There has been success in bringing in sufficient external funding to support the new area of research interest, as well as at least some of the center’s projected activities.
- There is a high probability of future success in bringing in sufficient external funding to support a center without further support internally, except as indicated in item (b) below.

Funding for a Center. A center may be funded in two ways:

- a) Depending on the circumstances, continued, limited seed funding may be available for a limited time period but with new and higher performance expectations.

- b) If the initiative has collectively generated at least \$1 million of F&A revenues per year, a funding plan that involves sharing of F&A revenues by colleges and the Office of the VPR can be developed. Such a funding plan may be possible in the following circumstances:
- The initiative has been formalized as a center and will assume a name that will be identified on the GoldSheet.
 - The researchers have proposed formal funding plans to the VPR and the respective college associate deans.
 - If the Office of the VPR is expected to participate in the funding plan, the colleges have agreed that the VPR will serve as the administrative unit and thereby will obtain 10 percent of the F&A that they generate.

Review process. Each unit should provide a brief annual report to its overseeing authority. As per Board of Regents policy, any center with an annual institutional financial commitment in excess of \$250,000 must be reviewed at least every seven years. See the “Guidelines for Institute/Center Reviews” and Board of Regents Form D—“Annual Listing of Reviews of Centers and Institutes.”

Sunset. If the center fails to sustain external funding or does not meet expectations as determined by the center review, the center will be closed. Centers may also be dissolved as they reach the end of their natural life span and usefulness to the research faculty. Approval to dissolve a center is required through the Board of Regents (see Form H—“Institutional Process to Request Elimination of Administrative Units”).

3. STAGE III: MOVING FROM A CENTER TO AN INSTITUTE

A successful center may be eligible to seek the status of an institute if the following conditions are present:

- The center has created sub-programs, each of which has the potential to grow into a center with its own sponsored funding.
- The center has demonstrated national prominence in that area of research.
- The center has the ability to meet other expectations (similar to the metrics of an NSF funded ERC/STC) in education, economic development, outreach, etc.
- The center has the potential to garner \$5 million in funding/year from a broad and diverse portfolio of funding sources.
- The center can articulate clearly the benefits of being named an institute and has appropriate management, oversight, and assessment plans.

Funding for an institute. Institutional support may be possible following the “funding plan” formula described above for a center in which colleges and the Office of the Vice President for Research (and possibly the Provost’s office) agree to share F&A revenues.

Review process. Each unit should provide a brief annual report to its overseeing authority. As per Board of Regents policy, any institute with an annual institutional financial commitment in excess of \$250,000 must be reviewed at least every seven years. See the “Guidelines for Institute/Center Reviews” and Board of Regents Form D—“Annual Listing of Reviews of Center and Institutes.”

Sunset. If the institute fails to sustain external funding or does not meet expectations as determined by the institute review, the institute will be closed. Institutes may also be dissolved as they reach the end of their natural life span and usefulness to the research faculty. Approval to dissolve a center is required through the Board of Regents (see Form H—“Institutional Process to Request Elimination of Administrative Units”).